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ABSTRACT

The extent to which increases in reading efficiency are attributable to a reading laboratory program was investigated. The experimental group consisted of all students enrolled in developmental reading and study skills laboratory programs at the Community College of Allegheny County, Boyce Campus. The two control groups were students enrolled in English composition courses. Neither group had participated in a class in efficient reading. Control A emphasized theme writing and some readings in literature; control B emphasized the reading of literature and combined this with some theme writing. Alternate forms of the Craig test were scored for rate and comprehension and computed to give efficiency. An interval of 6 weeks elapsed between pretesting and post-testing. Consideration was given to the problem of IQ and student motivation contributing to reading efficiency gains. Results showed that the experimental group averaged an increase of 48 percent in efficiency, while controls A and B averaged increases of 8 percent and 33 percent, respectively. The experimental group was initially the least efficient among the three groups, but ended with the highest average efficiency. The author concluded that it is advisable to place students in a reading laboratory program when they enroll in English courses emphasizing writing. (AW)

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Increasing Rate of Comprehension Among Community College Students

by Johanna H. Fields

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Increasing Rate of Comprehension Among Community College Students

Significance of Problem

Given the wide range of skills required for effective reading at the college level, improvement in rate of comprehension, i.e. efficiency, has the widest applicability for the greatest number of students. The primary goal of a program designed to increase efficiency is to enable the student to cover more material in a given amount of time, thus gaining for him the opportunity to read more widely and eventually improve all the factors that make for competent reading.

This study, undertaken at the Boyce Campus of the Community College of Allegheny County in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, during the spring semester of 1971 was conducted to determine to what extent, if any, increases in reading efficiency are attributable to a reading laboratory program. In order to isolate the effect of a reading laboratory program, the control must be capable of filtering the effect of efficiency practice and, simultaneously, hold constant as many other factors as possible. To achieve this, control groups were selected in which the amount of assigned reading was great enough to assure that reading practice was an experimental constant but that reading training was a variable. Control A was a group of students enrolled in English Composition I; control B was a group of students enrolled in English Composition II. Neither control A or control B had participated in a class in efficient reading. Control A emphasized theme writing and some readings in literature; control B emphasized the reading of literature and combined this with some theme writing. Students assigned to the reading laboratory were primarily concerned with increasing

eading efficiency. A few students assigned to the reading laboratory were simultaneously enrolled in Composition I or Composition II, but most were not taking any English course at all.

Population Assigned to Reading Laboratory

The Community College of Allegheny County maintains an open-door policy of admission. After being admitted to the college and before enrolling in any courses, students are given the Comparative Guidance and Placement test battery. As a follow up, each student meets with a member of the counseling staff to discuss his test score profile and his high school record in order to prepare a schedule for his first semester. At this time a counselor determines if a student is likely to experience difficulty with school work because of his reading or study habits; the student is urged to enroll in the three-hour per week reading laboratory program, Developmental Reading and Study Skills. The course does not carry credit towards a degree, but a letter grade is assigned which appears on the student's transcript. In addition to those students placed in the reading program by the counselors, a small number of second, third, and fourth semester students are enrolled in the course on the basis of their own referral or that of a faculty advisor.

Reading Laboratory Program

The course designated as Developmental Reading and Study Skills concentrates on refining two learning tools. Developmental Reading concentrates on perceptual training, comprehension exercises, and vocabulary instruction. Study Skills develops the area of note-taking, listening comprehension, outlining, and library usage. A diagnostic battery including the Telebinocular Vision Test and Audiometer Hearing Test is administered to students during the first two weeks of classes. The Cloze Comprehension Test is used to

selectively indicate students in need of remedial reading rather than developmental reading. Information from a test battery of silent and oral reading tests, plus insights gained from a personal inventory and interview, is used to assign each student to a program for reading improvement.

Experimental Design

The experimental group consisted of all students enrolled in Developmental Reading and Study Skills assigned to sections taught by the same instructor. Data is based on those students who were available for pre and post testing (n=23) and does not include students who withdrew from school or the course before pre and post testing was completed. Alternate forms of the Craig Test were scored for rate and comprehension and computed to yield efficiency. An interval of six weeks elapsed between pre and post testing.

The control consisted of two groups of students enrolled in English Composition courses. Control A (n=7) was a group of students who had not previously, nor were currently, enrolled in Developmental Reading. All control A students were taking Composition I from the same instructor, but that instructor was not the instructor for Developmental Reading. Control B (n=8) was a group of students enrolled in Composition II. As with control A, these students had no exposure to the reading laboratory program. The instructor for control B taught all control B students, but did not teach either control A or the experimental group. The controls differed from each other with respect to the amount of required reading. Composition I is primarily a theme writing course that includes some literature. Composition II is primarily an introduction to literature course that includes some theme writing.

It was hypothesized that students receiving specific practice and instruction in reading improvement would make gains in efficiency significantly greater than students of even somewhat higher ability who were assigned reading but not given specific instruction in higher level reading skills.

Confounding Variables

In the design of this investigation, care was exercised to eliminate extraneous variables from entering and obscuring data. First, consideration was given to the problem of pupils' I.Q. contributing to gains in reading efficiency. This factor, if it existed, probably favored the control groups because of the method used to place students in Developmental Reading. Therefore, it was felt that if the hypothesis was demonstrated to be true, it would tend to make the results err in the direction of conservatism.

It was not possible to eliminate introducing error from differential treatment of subjects due to differences in instructors. It was assumed that different instructors were not responsible for introducing a systematic bias, but rather that student response to instructor style was randomly distributed among all the students reported on in this investigation.

Finally, consideration must be given to student motivation to achieve under the conditions described. If students enrolled in a non-credit course tended to be less motivated, the bias favored a denial of the hypothesis. Thus, if the hypothesis was true it was highly probably that results would be a conservative estimate of the potential of a reading laboratory program.

It may appear at this point that students in Developmental Reading would tend to show greater gains simply because these students have more room in which to grow. If this were true, the results would be somewhat spurious. In fact, the differences in starting level were rather small compared

to the changes made.

Results

Students in the experimental group averaged an increase of 48 per cent in efficiency over a six week period; control A, the group that emphasized writing, averaged an increase of 8 per cent; control B, the group that emphasized reading, averaged an increase in efficiency of 33 per cent.

A summary of test findings is presented in Figure I. Examination of the data shows that the experimental group was, initially, the least efficient among the three groups tested, but ended the six-week period with a higher average efficiency than either control. Furthermore, closer examination of the data in Figure II reveals that the per cent of students in the experimental group who increased their efficiency was greater than the per cent of students in either control.

	Dev.Reading (n=23)	Comp.I (n=7)	Comp.II (n=8)
Average Efficiency (wpm) on Pre-Test	157	160	165
Average Efficiency (wpm) on Post-Test	233	172	220
Change in (wpm) Six Weeks	+76	+12	+55
Per Cent Increase in Efficiency	48	8	33

Figure I. Comparison of Changes in Efficiency Among Three Groups of Community College Students

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Change
1.	159	200	+41
2.	74	138	+64
3.	120	200	+80
4.	150	194	+44
5.	205	257	+52
6.	193	222	+29
7.	195	232	+37
8.	232	296	+64
9.	171	168	-3
10.	195	239	+44
11.	142	182	+40
12.	188	268	+80
13.	156	194	+38
14.	153	248	+95
15.	145	205	+60
16.	152	225	+73
17.	142	220	+78
18.	200	278	+78
19.	200	337	+137
20.	176	421	+245
21.	147	268	+121
22.	142	176	+34
23.	176	200	+24

Experimental Group: Developmental Reading

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Change
1.	120	80	-40
2.	100	137	+37
3.	83	126	+43
4.	257	298	+41
5.	266	212	-54
6.	160	205	+45
7.	133	145	+12

Control A: English Composition I

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Change
1.	216	200	-16
2.	135	133	-2
3.	81	312	+231
4.	160	200	+40
5.	242	197	-45
6.	222	189	-33
7.	147	332	+185
8.	116	200	+84

Control B: English Composition II

Figure II. Paired Pre and Post Test Scores

Significance of Results

It is apparent that significant increases in efficiency are made by students who read a great deal, regardless of special training provided by a reading laboratory. To be sure, greater gains in efficiency accrue to students deliberately taught to reduce sub-vocalization, regressions and number of fixations. However, gains made by the control B group, though less than those made by the experimental group, make a meaningful contribution to global reading skill. Data collected in this study points to the advisability of placing students in a reading laboratory program either before, or at the same time, that they are experiencing an English course that emphasizes writing. This assures the least overlap of skills emphasis.

It is recommended that further studies of this kind be conducted at other campuses as a means of testing the applicability of the conclusion to larger populations.